Depot Town Rag

Volume 18, Number 1 *"All the news in one block in one month."*

100% FREE Rag Content
January 1995

- District reflectory
- How buildings learn
- *Talking Antiques*
- **Slackers**
- Starting over

and other strictly local stuff. . . .

A Publication of the DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, MI 48198

'Twas the season...

Another successful Victorian Holiday took place here last month, thanks to Sandy Hoag, Midge Prybyla, their committees and helpers.

The district was (and is) swagged in tradition for the month-long event, proving once again that a fine commerical Christmas tradition can still fit the calendar and not be wedged into every promotional activity beginning with the Fourth of July weekend.

Santa held hearings at the former Depot Exchange property with much local coverage all through the season. Who would ever have expected so many of Santa's helpers were from Depot Town?

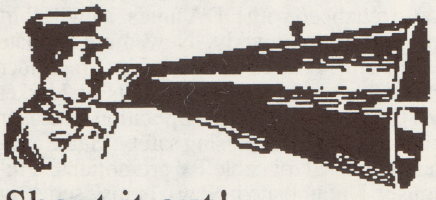
There was excellent press in up to 20 dailies around souteastern Michigan and many shoppers avoided the hostile expanses of suburban mall parking lots to amble up and down the friendly sidewalks of this old business center.

"I did all my Christmas shopping in Depot Town," wrote one happy supporter as she renewed her membership this month.

Outstanding among the area events were the several Christmas craft shows at the Freighthouse, with an Economy Crafts Show drawing hundreds on a Sunday.

Steve Gross' auctions drew still more crowds with one of his events auctioning off Jack Miller's prized toy collection. It was a collectors' event that drew aficianadoes from all over the country.

Holiday window displays were colorful and creative, as usual, and even the city manager used the popular resurgence of pedestrian traffic as a platform to remind citizens of the responsibility of keeping sidewalks clean throughout Our Town. Depot Towners have always known that a clean window and clean sidewalk are the best invitations to their clientele and it was good to see the message broadcast even farther beyond our tiny environs.



Shout it out!

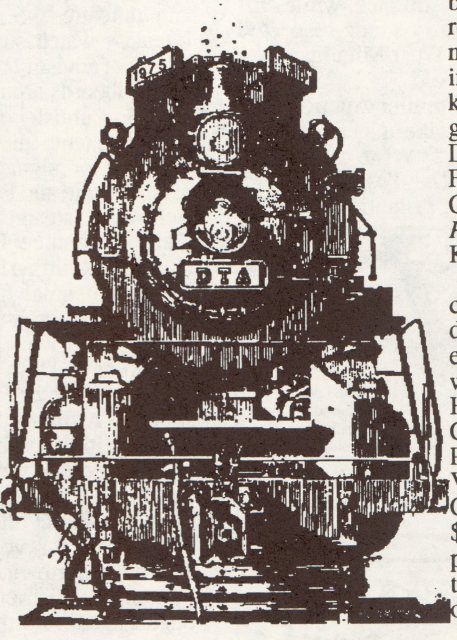
They're having a great time down in Ypsilanti's historic Depot Town, and yet another promotional brochure is in the works to reach out to those whom have not yet discovered that Depot Town *is* what America *was*!

Depot Town Association 20th ANNIVERSARY

20 years of recent history at the RR tracks

1975 - Depot Town Association founded, dedicated "to preserving the unique character of the neighborhood and to the enhancement of its business climate." Review Billy Turner's plan for a restaurant in depot.

1976 - Gets funds for Preservation/Urban Design Inc. to study and publish a preservation plan for the district.



1977 - Incorporation status. "Save the Depot" work bees. First legal-size now-and-again newsletter wonders at name: *Mainline, Whistle Stop, Highballer, Right Track, Left Track.* Dailies call Association by initials. City Planning Commission adopts Depot Town Plan. Parking meters removed.

1978 - Tax-exempt with 501(c)3 status. Get City to buy freighthouse from Conrail for Farmers' Market. Take 280 on charter Amtrak stops to Detroit's Renaissance Center. Supervise CETA workers in summer clean-up projects. Help administer CDBG funds for new sidewalks, planters, street paving. Sidewalk Celebration brings mayor to dedications; jazz, art, beer tent create possibility for annual event. Historic District formed to include Depot Town. Hold dinner/dance, "148th Annual Spring Rite, " for 200 in upstairs ballroom. Merchants' raffle conducted.

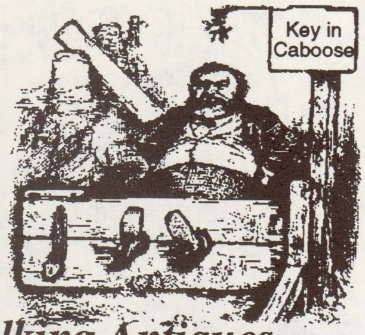
1979 - First Ypsilanti Yesteryear Heritage Festival planned with others. Farmers' Market open outdoors in summer. Renumbering proposed by Ypsilanti Post Office dropped. "Spring Rite" repeated with round-robin theme, II-V-I Orchestra. CDBG funds approved for 'north side' parking, rejected by property owners. DTA recognized by Chamber of Commerce. Constitution revised. Octoberfest planned.

1980 - Campaign begins to bring ancient Grand Trunk caboose to block. Caboose arrives on Valentine's Day. Benefit with big band in Eagles' Club ballroom. Hire out district maintenance and cleaning. Help City form Market Advisory Board. Begin talks for Downtown Development Authority. Farmers' Market opens. Caboose restored. *Perfesser* Malarkey's Kidsart in caboose.

1981 - *Rag* name official, monthly, publishes dates. Boomer Days celebrate hobos in rail yards with family events. First Heritage Jazz fest. Childrens' Hallowe'en Party in Freighthouse. Victorian Holiday opens Christmas season. Seek $115,000 in grants for parking and beautification. Host Artrain's second visit.

1982 - Get Ypsilanti Area Futures to adopt Save the Depot Task Force. Work with City to replace Cross Street Bridge. Form alliance with WEMU: first Frog Island Festival, Winter Jazz Series begins in freighthouse with heat from pot-bellied stove. Review Architects Plus plans for depot restaurant. Tramp art exhibition accompanies Boomer Days. Caboose logo designed. Winter Jazz series founded. Caboose debts paid off. Retail merchants organize as committee of DTA. Historic DT Foundation formed.

1983 - *Rag* moves to Standard Printing, tabloid, newsprint format. [continued overleaf]



Talking Antiques
'heard' in print again

"As the side chair said to the tea table . . . "

Steve Gross and Tom Schmidt will see their "Talking Antiques" column reappear in the regular Big City Version of *The Ann Arbor News* which will air in the copies distributed in the county seat and in Ypsilanti.

Beginning as a weekly column in the style of television's "Furniture On The Mend" and radio's "Car Talk" in the deceased *Ypsilanti Press*, the column was one of the many attributes missed when the Ypsi daily folded. Now it's back in the new incarnation.

Both antiquers on this block over the years, the two bring their considerable expertise back into print beginning with late-December installments and great regularity in the new year.

Steve was co-owner of Depot Exchange, the district's first purveyor of antiques, and Tom came to the district with his brothers years ago to form JCT Antiques, while still keeping ties with the family's long-respected Schmidt's Antiques on West Michigan Avenue.

Today they operate Premier Auction Services and are ready to take questions from antiquers about their craft. Write to them via Talking Antiques, c/o *The Ypsilanti Press*, 301 W. Michigan Ave, Ypsilanti MI 48197.

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20 years [continued from page one]

Administer commerical loan program. Fight to maintain integrity of Historic District and Ordinance in City election. Suggest 'Cross Street Bridge' as Heritage Festival theme, host bridge-art exhibition. Get Amtrak to agree to 30-year deal on depot. Sponsor charter train trip to Bellevue, Ohio. DT Foundation seeks control of Freighthouse. Host UM architects' designs for district. Offer variety of insurance programs for small businesses. Boomer Days continue. Standard Printing shifts from newsprint to hard-white stock for monthly *Rag* publication. Business hours studied, retail merchants stay open until 8 p.m. Neighborhood Watch formed. Cross Street closed for summer while bridge is replaced. City spurns proposal for directional signs to Depot Town. Merchants' brochure created. Support 'Operation SAM' for $25,000 fund-raiser for Heritage Fest. Second steam train excursion to Bellvue, Ohio. Join Washtenaw Council for the Arts as arts support group. Participate in "the Depot Town Eclectic" exhibition at Henry Ford Community College.

1984 - City Council stalls DDA. Co-sponsor "A Pair of Aces" gambling event in Freighthouse with Central Business Community (CBC). Steam train excursion sold out. Merchants' Committee takes over Heritage Fest planning for block. Dedicate new Cross Street Bridge at opening. Create one-way street pattern for Market Plaza. Steam train trip reunion hosted here. Negotiate with Detroit Edison for mercury vapor steet lights. Aid in design for Frog Island redux and amphitheatre. Solicit for Salvation Army. Intensify watch on Freighthouse operations, rebirth of advisory committee. Erect commercial billboards around county.

1985 - Publish new brochure and directory. Celebrate tenth anniversary. Redirect efforts on City for signage. Billboard campaign reaches State and Federal highways. Sponsor sternwheel steamboat moonlight cruise on Ohio's Maumee River. Charter train to Durand's Railroad Days. Welcome Michigan Sesquicentennial Commission for meeting. Monitor rail crossing closing for extensive repairs. Seek winter quarters here for Artrain. Last Boomer Days celebration.

1986 - Winter Jazz Series expands. Co-sponsors Artrain's third visit with EMU. April Fool's edition bombs with little recognition of altered (foolish) format. Get delay from City on alley designations. Post 'Welcome' sign on west wall of Follett House. Hold 'thank-you' party for volunteers at jazz events. Artrain's fourth visit. City erects street signs pointing to district. Signal Tower project begins again. Form Antique Engine Club as sub-group. December *Rag* features Richard Haas' original children's story, "The Depot Town Riddle: A Mystery," in special eight-page edition. Madrigal Concert crowns Victorian Holiday event.

1987 - Michigan Sesquicentennial series begins. Artists & Artisans group aligns. New Initiative For Tourism in Ypsilanti (NIFTY) program kicks off. Co-sponsor Easter-Egg Hunt. Dedicate Tridge installation at Frog Island, Riverside Park entry. Artrain's next visit. Engineering Society of neighborhood kids formed for civic projects; caboose gets painted again. Intercession paves way for depot sale to private owners. North-side parking lot developed according to Association plan along Frog Island. Gingerbread house contest promoted.

1988 - Review Des Rosiers Architects newest plan for depot restaurant. Lights added to Follett House 'welcome' sign. Ypsi Opry with Nashville's Billy Walker and the Tennessee Walkers puts treasury in the red. Jazz Operating Agreement reached with WEMU. City's northside alley study completed, one-ways and parking resolved. DDA reactivation sought. Victorian bake-off held. Fourth of July Parade comes to the district. Mayor appoints new DDA. Artrain returns. Merchants' Committee turns over $20,000 state grant to rehab Freighthouse.

1989 - Harvey C. Colburn's 'Story of Ypsilanti' series. Develop brochure for opening of Radisson Hotel. TIFA and 2-mil programs studied. Ann Arbor convention planners visit. Jazz cancelled at Heritage Fest. Align with Michigan Coalition of Neighborhood Associations. Heritage Fest casino shared with CBC. Artrain's next visit features antique toys. Bakers' Best cook book published as fund-raiser. City attorney stalls DDA reorganization.

1990 - Ad Valorem Tax approved for DDA. Study finds 4200 cars cross these streets daily. Signal Tower replication campaign in full sway. New appointees put DDA back into action. Council dumps DDA plan. Sponsor Gus Macker team. Frog Island Festival concept sold to The Ark. Shoppers' Surveys poll hundreds for demographics, prizes awarded. Sponsoring businesses get DTA decals for door windows. EMU marketing focuses here. Cookie-of-the-Year Contest sponsored. Signal Tower replication hyped for Cross/River/RR tracks location.

1991 - Business owners take most DTA offices. Destination 'shadow' signs and street directory installed. Signs, benches, shanty in place. Gives Hallowe'en Hoopla to City Parks & Rec deptartment. Signal Tower completed, principal volunteers lauded. Five-year business plan developed. Santa's Parade is world's shortest. Final Winter Jazz Series.

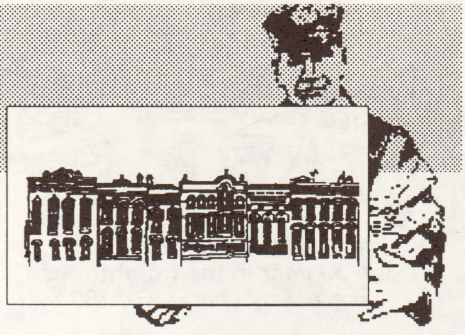
1992 - Chamber helps design 'strategic planning model.' Host street rods' kick-off party. Frog Island program books still operated by DTA to support *Rag*. Support plan to block Augusta Township toxic incinerator plan. City agrees to enforce ordinances on isolated delinquent properties. Merchants' Committee revived; new hours help.

1993 - Host second street rods' kick-off party. New series: Everyday Life in Depot Town in the Nineteenth Century. Anheuser-Busch/Budweiser Clydesdales perform. Caboose rehabbed with DDA funds. New T-shirt design sells out quickly. New, more intimate relationship created with EMU. Broadsider brochure created. Appointments to Market Advisory bring new life. Operation Lifesaver series stresses RR crossing safety. Stake merchant proposal for cable TV promotions. 'Previously Unpublished News Items' series in *Rag*; 'Depot Town Death Trip' series follows. Street directory updated.

1994 - First, ever, all-business officers. Police given full use of caboose for local station. Constitution review begins again.

Dateline: Depot Town

A Neighborhood Forgotten by Time (and Life and Newsweek)



Give us some slack, Jud and Jack

"SLACKER: Young, gifted, unemployed," or so says the button available in hip gift shops trying to get a leg up on some kind of new fad to take the place of Pet Rocks, Smiley Faces, and wall placques that look like Holstein cows. Riders of the newest generation-gap band wagon will probably say they see those disaffected folk in some of our favorite places down here. Who knows? Maybe they'll think *they* is *us*!

The Ypsi/Ann Press/News dedicated a whole *Ke-'nek-shen* section front page recently to reviewing Sarah Dunn's new book out of Warner Books, "Official Slacker Handbook," and stuck in a sidebar noting "If you're slacking, you probably already know: Places to shop cheap: 1. Kiwanis sale, Washington/First streets and 2. Value Village, Michigan Avenue, Ypsilanti." That was the whole list of places to "shop cheap." Obviously these two are not among the big advertisers in that daily paper. The sidebar then listed three places to get "lunch for a buck," and the "ultimate drink special" at A2's 8-ball Saloon on First Street. So much for cheap. The rest was made up of *cheap shots*.

Judson Branam, staff reporter, noted, "Slackers. They're out there, devoting their time to playing rugby and taking a couple classes, or, as one sometime-slacker puts it, sitting transfixed in front of the TV as though it were a source of zen meditation." He describes it as a new rite of "non-passage in some cases." *The Press/News* just won't let go, will it?

Local columnist, Jack Gillard, goes on to magnanimously suggest we "Give slackers some slack," in which he recounts sleeping on the job at an Alpena cement factory in his working days. Biggest indicator of No Place To Slack, according to Jack, is the absence of park benches. He calls them "loafers' benches" and notes they were prevalent around general stores, feed mills, stables, train stations, stage line offices, freight depots, interurban streetcar waiting rooms, steamboat landings, the local dairy, telegraph offices, grist mills." Hey! Wait a minute Jack. You forgot the ones at the barbership, in front of the Food Co-op, in the Market Plaza by the caboose, and along the sidewalks in front of many of the stores all over Ypsilanti's historic Depot Town!

Other instances of Jack's observations include almost anyone sitting in a coffeeshop talking to their neighbors. This old district - or some place like it - must have been part of Jack's distant past but, from his conclusions, it would seem he never sat down to listen to what was really going on in those conversations. Would he think 89-year-old Jonesy is slacking? When our councilmembers sit down here to talk, is that slacking? Are all those kids and moms and dads with ice cream cones slacking when they use those banches?

They aren't loafing. They are communicating. It's the grease that holds the community together. (Conservative writers take note: same root word as *Communism*!)

That's a difficult concept to absorb when your own particular brand of communication happens in groups of people sitting in darkened offices with their backs to each other while they individually peck in questions to a computer screen hoping to make a connection on the Information Highway World-Wide Internet Electronic Mail Superconductor. That's not loafing? Well, it's typing *and* loafing.

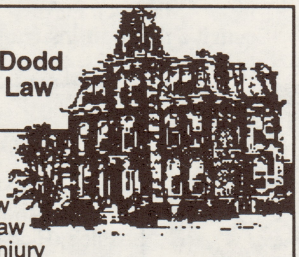
Perhaps the popular press will absolve anyone of the slacker tag whom they observe consuming some advertiseable product while sitting on those park benches and talking. Now *there's* a new definition for consumerism.

And what about all those benches out at the malls? Are they just filled with slackers, loafers, lookers, hookers, and run-aways? We don't think so. Maybe they're just people whose feet hurt. Or they're waiting for something important to happen. Or maybe - just maybe - they're *communicating* with each other as if they were members of a *community*. And maybe they're talking about the days when everybody didn't have to fit into some Those Other Guys category.

Too often our City Cousins refer to their Country Cousins' districts and towns as "sleepy" or "slow-moving." When your car has still not cooled down from the expressway, it could take several agonizingly long minutes to get into the pace of a neighborhood conversation over a cup of coffee on a street-side park bench.

Give us locals some slack, Jud and Jack. You could collect a wealth of vital human interest stories in just such a locale that boasts benches, loafers *or* parkers.

Gregory L. Dodd
Attorney at Law



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Depot Town Center

Lifespan Learning Programs
January/Februray, 1995

• Workshops • Seminars
• Lectures • Performances
Chronologically listed by topic:

January

- Opera: Where Theater and Music Meet - Part I
- Wills, Trusts & Estate Planning
- The Wonder of the Galapagos Islands
- Understanding Ethnic Conflict in the Balkans
- Country Music in America
- Opera: Where Theatre and Music Meet - Part II
- Ventriloquist Ricahrd Paul
- The Music of Ireland
- The New Europe - After the Berlin Wall

February

- Poisonous Plants in Your LIfe
- The New South Africa; Land of Opportunities
- Harp/percussion/vocal duo Harpbeat
- The Art of Ireland
- The Evolution of Desire: How Men & Women Choose Mates
- The American Circus: Part of Our Heritage
- Storyteller LaRon Williams
- The Literature of Ireland
- American Humor Today: Endangered or Enlightened?
- Half of the Well-known Duo Gemini - Sandor Slomovitz
- Communication Workshop for Couples

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Depot Town Association, Inc.

15 DECEMBER 1994:

Minutes of November approved as published.

Market Advisory Board: Dave French reports that there will be a 55% increase to the vendors at the Freighthouse over the next four years.

Depot Town Downtown Development Authority: The issue of angle parking on Cross Street in Depot Town will be discussed at the next DDA meeting which will be held 4 January 1995 at 8 A.M. at the Freighthouse.

Events: Festival of Lights is going strong. Early figures show a good attendance with even some out-of-state visitors.

Locations for Gus Macker are being considered and may find the tournaments at Washtenaw Community College or Briarwood Mall. More news to follow.

Caboose: Discussion of timer for the side light on Caboose to be adjusted to come on earlier. Contract with city to have officer in the caboose and use as a mini-station has been signed.

Old Business:

New Year's Jubilee: Carolyn McKeever reports that volunteers are still needed at the Freigthhouse to sell badges. If you can give an hour and help out, please contact here.

Bylaws: Depot Town Association members are encouraged to review old bylaws and jot down any changes or revisions for next meeting.

New Business:

Snow removal: Terry McDonald to check with city to see about removal of the white stuff. Some areas seem to be no-man's land.

Next Meeting: 19 January 1995 at 7:30 P.M. at Renewed Interest Antiques.

Best Yet Award: Everyone who participated in any way with the Festival of lights, you may all take a bow.

More local than we thought:

Staffers at the *Ypsilanti Courier* have called to correct our error of last month: They're not printed in Jackson, after all; they're printed in Tecumseh. Still, their excellent coverage of Ypsilanti speaks well for Our Town's fledgling weekly. We urge our readers' support.

DTA's bylaws to be reviewed

Members are encouraged to review the DTA bylaws and here's a subject index to start some thought in that direction.

Originally written in 1974 and adopted in 1975, then amended in 1984 and 1991, many agree that it's time to take another look and see if we're really doing what we say we're doing -or should change our rules of governance. Copies of the entire six-page document will again be available for all who wish to help at January's meeting.

As amended by the membership on December 12, 1984:

- NAME
- PURPOSE
- DESCRIPTION
- MEMBERSHIP
- STEERING COMMITTEE
- DUTIES OF STEERING COMMITTEE
- EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
- OFFICERS
- DUTIES OF OFFICERS
- COMMITTEES
- MEETINGS
- REMOVAL FROM OFFICE
- DUES
- FISCAL YEAR
- AMENDMENTS
- DISSOLUTION

Amended 17 October 1991:

- INDEMNIFICATION

Guarantee

Your support makes a difference!

Please include me among the members of

The Depot Town Association, Inc.

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Street _____

City_____State_____ZIP _____

I'm available to help with Association projects. Call me at _____

Annual dues:

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- ❑ $100 Life Member (A great deal if you had joined in 1976!)
- ❑ Please place my name on the monthly mailing list of *The Depot Town Rag*
- ❑ Don't mail *The Rag.* I'll pick it up in the neighborhood.

✂ Clip and send check to "Depot Town Association"
c/o The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

January 1995

Depot Towners are invited to participate in any or all of the following activities for the good of this old commercial district:

- **Depot Town Association**
  7:30 p.m., Thursday, 19th
  Renewed Interest Antiques
- **Antique Engine Club**
  7:30 p.m. Thursday, 26th

THE DEPOT TOWN RAG

A publication of the Depot Town Association, Inc. a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to preserving the unique character of the neighborhood and to the enhancement of its business climate. -Tom Dodd, editor

The Depot Town Association, Inc.
Tom Steele, president
c/o The Old Caboose
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Dearie, do you remember . . .

Not a 'directory,' but a 'reflectory' of *isms* and *wasms* among our supporters

There may have been 'a million stories in the Naked City,' but there are at least 154 stories in the sponsors of *The Depot Town Rag* over the past two decades. Some have been here forever; others left quickly. Still more were 'outsiders' interested in riding on - and adding to - the success of the renaissance being experienced down in Ypsilanti's old railroad district. Watch for more information this year on who stayed, who left, and what they did while they were here.

Action Rental
Ad Art
Alibi Bar
And Everything Nice
Apple Annie's Vintage Clothing
Aubree's Saloon
Aunt T's Crafts & Supplies
B & D Retail Plumbing & Heating
BJ's Trading Cards
Back in a Minute Antiques
Bar-Gan Auto Rental
Barr, John, for district judge
Basic Flower Arranging Classes
Bell, Book & Candle
Bette Davis, The
Big Bob's Magazines
Black Bart's Pizza
Blind Pig Saloon
Borders Book Shop
Bradstreet Glass, Ltd.
Cady's Grill
Charismart
Church, D.L. Construction,
City Body Carstar
City Body Shop
City Radiator
Classic Coupes
Companion Care, Vickie Glassman
Cooper TV
Cozy Corner
Crazy Barb's Paperback Book Exchange
Cricket Box, The
Cross Street Antiques
Cuthbert, Pam, for City Council
Daily Grind Coffee House
Dawn Treader Book Shop
Deli Shoppe, The
DeLoof & Associates, Inc., realtors
Depot Doo Fine Design in Hair Style & Nails
Depot Exchange Antiques
Depot Mailbox
Depot Town Auction Gallery
Depot Town Counseling Center
Depot Town General Store
Depot Town Sourdough Bakery
Designs on You & Treasures
Dodd, G.L., atty.
EMU Depot Town Center
Esquire Custom Drapery & Blinds
Fantasee Lighting
Fidelity Life Insurance
Fingerle, Hollister, Wood Lumber Co.
Forbes Cleaners
Fraternal Order of Eagles
Freeman Bunting Insurance Agency
Frog Island Music Festival
Godin's Volkswagen Service
Golden Age Showcase
Gosa's Creative Photography
Grand Trunk, Ltd., The
Great Train Race, The
Gus Macker 3-on-3 Tournament
Health Emporium, The
Hoeft, Robert, Company, Realtors
Hon's Flowers
Huron Valley Office Supplies
Huron Valley TV
Ike's Barbershop
Image Photo Lab
Isshinryu Karate
J & J Plastercraft Studio
J & R Trading Post
J.C.T. Antiques
Jacqueline's Boutique
Jigsaw Puzzles, Charles Thayer
Jim MacDonald's Antiques

K, B & D Plumbing
Katrina's Hair Studio
Kelly Services
LaLeche League of Ypsilanti
Landmark, realty broker
Lawson's Upholstering
Leather Bags & Rags
Lentz Mufflers
Magnetic Fluid Conditioning
Magoo's Car Wash
McKeever, Gary, for Charter Commissioner
Me 'N' My Sisters' Country Store
Mean Bean, The
Meleco Running Board Co.
Messina's Cheese
Miller Motors
Miller's Ice Cream Parlor
Mymassologist, Joan M. Scully
Now and Then Antiques and Collectibles
O'Dell Chiropractic Clinic
Occasion Station, The
Oceans in Motion
Old Town Café
Old Town Restaurant
Old Town Treasure
Olde Towne Coin & Gold
Our Little Secret
Paponetti's Pasta
Peddler's Path
Phantom of the Attic
Piano Lessons, Steve Gustafson
Potpourri Gardens
Profit, Kirk A., State Representative
Pronto Pizza
Rainbow Jewelry
Rainbow Silk Screen Co.
Red Rooster Pizza
Rexmax realtors
Remington-Walker Design Associates
Renewed Interest Antiques
Renovations, Dervin R. Mood
Richard Reid's Hair Station
River Artworks
River Street Antiques
Riverside Lawn & Garden Supply
Rosemary's Corner
Schoolkids' Records
Shear Genius
Sidetrack Bar & Grill
Something Special
Speedy Printing
Spotlight, Ann Arbor News
Standard Printing
Sticks
T.H.E. Market
Take Five Coffee Shop
Teachers Shop & Learning Center, Ltd.
Tech Style Junction
Ted's Auto Electric
Terry McDonald for City Council
Thompson Building Mall
Village Corner
Vintage Passion
Vitamin Shoppe, The
Washtenaw Cartage
Washtenaw Council for the Arts
Weber Drug
When In Doubt, Inc.
Whistlestop Concerts
Wiard's Orchards, Inc.
Winding River Art and Antique Originals
Ypsilanti Food Co-op
Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation
Ypsilanti Players
Ypsilanti Recycling Project
Ypsilanti's Farmers' Market

20 years of neighborhood support and cooperation!

Book review:

Depot Towners know!

How buildings learn: What happens after they're built by Stewart Brand (Viking, $30). One glance at the cheap strip malls, cheesy fast food joints, crumbling office buildings, and endless anonymous subdivisions choking Amercan cities should convince even a casual observer that something is rotten in American architecture. Are architects alone to blame? Why do they keep designing sculptural monstrosities that look great in glossy magazines but are horrible to work in? Why can't architects design simple, functional buildings that can be incrementally adjusted through time and enrich the mundane, glamorless lives most Americans lead?

In *How Buildings Learn*, Stewart Brand, founder of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, professional gadfly, and longtime student of our built environment, interviews not only such leading architectural thinkers as Chrisopher Alexander, Peter Calthorpe, and Sim Van der Ryn, but also facilites managers, homeowners, and carpenters, always seeking an answer to his question, 'What makes a building come to be loved?" Brand's thesis is simple: We think of buildings as permanent, but all buildings change through time; those that adapt poorly are torn down, while those that adapt well to changing functions, fashions, and fads not only survive but come to be loved.

Brand documents degrees of change in dozens of photographic comparisions of the same building or site through time, a tool he calls "rephotography." In a typical sequence, he traces a single building on Main Street in Okmulgee, Oklahoma, from its origins as a single-story wood-frame general store to a two-story sandstone box (1884) that was later wrapped in an elegant brick and limestone facade (1920) then "modernized" into a bank with stucco and strip windows (1954) before being lovingly restored (1988). Photographic sequences like this one are the heart and soul of *How Buildings Learn*, and they make a compelling argument for the subdiscipline of studying how buildings change through time that Brand proposes.

The problems he desbribes are complex, and simple solutions often make the problems worse. Brand won my trust by confessing how the *Whole Earth Catalog* promoted geodesic domes, one of the best-intentioned but most technically unworkable fads ever to sweep housing. And he transcends simplistic architect bashing by recognizing that the developer, the banker, the realtor, and ultimately the user must all be willing to pay higher up-front costs to get a building that is more permanent and adaptable. Brand doesn't have all the answers, but he does ask all the right questions.

It's about time somebody wrote this book. The schlocky Edge City of disposable architecture won't improve until more Americans notice and object. This quirky, thoughtful volume, bursting with curiosity and intelligence, may make our everyday world more visible to more Americans. Architecture is too important to be left to architects alone.

- Robert Gerloff,
Utne Reader, Jan-Feb 1995

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A Depot Town SAMPLER

Starting all over again, again

City Council can start all over with a new City Charter and 1995 starts another year for everybody who uses Julius Ceasar's calendar. Every month is another beginning when we publish a monthly neighborhood newsletter and officers for the Association have been in place long enough that the newness is beginning to fade with programs for the new year looming excitedly on the horizon of the depot district.

We often lament that New Year's Day doesn't really seem like the beginning of a new year and it ought to happen about the time the first crocuses peep through the snow, but we tend to spend the next several months in Michigan preparing for a new year of spring, summer, fall, and the inevitable winter.

Too often we make every new start into a vague reincarnation of something we've done before - not really very new, at all - when we could really have tried something different.

As the Depot Town Association begins its third decade, it might well review some of the old ideas it discarded back in 1974. One proposal to the Chamber of Commerce was to make this side of Ypsi into a little Frankenmuth with Tyrolean Trolls popping out of remodeled Alpine façades of our ancient buildings. Another plan that never got too far was to close off East Cross Street and plant trees down the center in competition with the outlying mall developments. What a revolting development that could have been!

Still other false starts embraced the concept of a raised railroad, giving the district an 'underneath the El' effect. Still another suggested putting the community under a giant glass dome with flaps to admit the trains and sprinkling systems to keep the dust down. Think again.

All interested in helping chart the course for DTA's twenty-first year are encouraged to join their neighbors on the third Thursday. We didn't get this good by accident. Lots of hard work brought us here, and it'll take even more now that we've reached the age of majority!

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